

Pack your waterproof sunscreen and splash your way through Indiana.

By Sally Campbell Grout

If you're the kind of person who must have every hair in place at all times, you may want to look elsewhere for summer fun. But if you're ready to celebrate the season with wild waterways, rollicking rides, a little sand, and a lot of sun, these Indiana destinations are made for you.

Now, the song makes sense.

Back when the Beach Boy sang about Aruba, Jamaica, and Kokomo all in the same sentence, most of us didn't see the connection. But now, Kokomo does offer some tropical fun--at Kokomo Beach (765-456-7540), a new water park. Cool off in the leisure pool or lazy river; test yourself in the competition and lap pool or at sand volleyball. Zip your way down "high energy" slides, or watch the little ones at the kids' slides or children's sand playground. A bathhouse, family changing room, and food court make it easy to spend a whole day here.

A man-made river can be wild, too.

Some rides require work, such as the kind you find at East Race Waterway (574-233-6121) in South Bend. As the first artificial whitewater course in North America and one of only six in the world, East Race Waterway has welcomed Olympic and National champions. But don't worry if you're not a veteran rafter; the course is opened to both beginners and advanced participants. Rafts and funyacks (inflatable kayaks) are available for rent; however, kayakers and canoers must provide their own equipment. The course runs 1,500 feet, giving you ample time to work up a sweat and cool off in the water simultaneously.

The beach is just the beginning.

For years, the folks at Indiana Beach in Monticello (574-583-4141) have been telling you "there's more than corn in Indiana." This summer is the perfect time to find out just how much more. Some of the fun things you'll find: five "white-knuckle" inducing roller coasters (including Indiana's fastest, the Hoosier Hurricane), plenty of other amusement rides, a giant water park, a sand beach, a 1,400-acre lake, restaurants, entertainment, and places to stay and camp. This year, Indiana Beach thrills visitors with a new ride: Air Crow. Climb aboard to fly over the waters of Lake Shafer. Riders can swing themselves higher for an even more breathtaking experience.

A zoo with a view.

The Indianapolis Zoo (317-630-2001) puts a new spin on a day with the animals. Along with watching the lions, elephants, polar bears, emus,

kangaroos, giraffes, and dozens of other animals, you can ride, splash, and play. The Kombo Family Coaster climbs to about 24 feet and reaches a top speed of 21 miles per hour. A 4-D simulator takes riders on an African Safari. The carousel, appropriately located near the petting zoo, offers kid-style thrills, and the White River Junction Train Ride takes you through a big portion of the zoo at a leisurely pace. The Enchanted Mill playground is the perfect place for kids to burn off some steam and, on hot days, cool off. A section of the playground has water jets that shoot up from the ground, along with a “dolphin” and “seal” who squirt water.

Another zoo that’s cool.

If the animals in Evansville’s Mesker Park Zoo and Botanic Garden (812-435-6143) knew how much fun there was to be found outside their exhibit areas, they’d probably start a stampede. The zoo is, first and foremost, a place to get reacquainted with nature. It’s home to more than 500 animals, hundreds of botanical species, a children’s enchanted forest, and African, tropical, and Asian exhibits. But you can also try the bumper boats or tram rides. Just try not to flaunt it in front of the animals.

All that and free soft drinks, too.

Every amusement park has them: those smiling characters that say, “You must be as tall as me to ride this ride.” At Holiday World and Splashin’ Safari (877 GO FAMILY) in Santa Claus, you’re sure to have fun whether you’re under the line or way past it. The little ones will love the large variety of tame rides in Holidog’s FunTown and Rudolph’s Reindeer Ranch. Plus, they’ll find more than enough places to splash and play in the water park, including Butterfly Bay and Crocodile Isle. But the big kids (of all ages) can see if they’re up to the challenge of “The Raven” or “The Legend,” two wooden roller coasters that rank in the world’s top 10. The water park is not without its rides to get your heart racing, including “Zoombabwe,” the world’s largest enclosed waterslide; and the new Jungle Racer, the first 10-lane racing slide complex ever built. In addition, Holiday World and Splashin’ Safari visitors are entitled to free soft drinks, free sunscreen, and a chance to meet Santa at his summer home.

For thrills of a different kind...

Maybe you prefer to your heart-racing thrills in air-conditioned comfort. Along the Ohio River, in South Central Indiana, three sparkling casinos—just a few miles apart—offer opportunities for grown-up fun. Belterra Casino Resort in Belterra (888-235-8377) has 1,500 slots, 41 table games, five restaurants, deluxe rooms, a spa, a salon, and an incredible golf course. At Argosy Casino and Hotel in Lawrenceburg (888-274-6797), you’ll find more than 2,000 slots, nearly 100 table games, specialty restaurants, and a hotel. Along with casino games, Grand Victoria Casino and Resort in Rising Sun (800-GRAND-11) provides guests with an

indoor pool and health club, live entertainment on selected nights, restaurants, and the area's only Scottish links-style golf course.

The summer sampler.

Columbian Park (765-807-1531) in Lafayette offers a sample of everything that you're looking for in summer family fun: a zoo, with more than 120 animals representing 49 different species; seven amusement rides (including four made just for kids and a 10-minute train ride); and Tropicanoe Cove, home of eight water attractions, including the twisting, turning Banana Peel tube slide and relaxing Cattail Crik. The Frog Pond (actually, a big pool) features a family-friendly zero-depth entry.

Little pockets of fun.

For people in the Indianapolis area, Indy Parks and Recreation (317-327-PARK) provide lots of places to play throughout the city. In fact, there are 165 parks in all; Indy Parks has aquatic facilities in 23 of them, including 16 outdoor pools, six indoor (year-round) pools, and a beach at Eagle Creek Park. Many pools feature slides, water sprays, and lots more than simply a place to do laps.

The wild river.

Lake County, with its proximity to Lake Michigan, is certainly appropriately named. However, for the last 10 years, a river has been winding its way toward fun seekers throughout the area: Deep River Water Park in Merrillville (800-928-7275). Among the places to play: the Paddlers' Play Area, which offers low-key fun for children; and The Dragon, a wild water slide that can send "sliders" down at speeds up to 35 m.p.h. Bringing a big group? Consider playing Water Wars, an interactive water challenge game.

Even its name sounds relaxing.

Berne, Indiana is steeped in Amish and Swiss tradition. But the town does know how to celebrate 21st century fun, and no place is that more evident than at Pine Lake Water Park (260-334-5649). This natural water, sandy beach offers water slides, a tower, paddleboats, volleyball, and all the amenities of summer fun.

Frogs and snakes in a man-made pool?

Sure, Burdette Park Aquatic Center in Evansville (812-435-5602) has frogs and snakes in the children's pool. But they're not real—or even real looking. They're giant-sized, and they're fun slides the little ones are sure to enjoy. Elsewhere in the park, you'll find two long, lightening fast slides, a lazy river raft ride, and Olympic pool with two diving boards, a gift shop, a float stand, a large deck area, and an upper deck with a concession area that overlooks the whole aquatic center. For your convenience, you can rent a raft or flotation device.

Surf the web for more water fun.

Want to find all of Indiana's places to play, splash, and celebrate summer?

Visit enjoyindian.com.